Small Business Gains Certification, International Recognition Through DoD Mentor-Protégé Program

Army Col. Kenneth Dobeck Guides DoD-Industry Partnership

RALPH STODDARD

The Department of Defense (DoD) Pilot Mentor-Protégé Program (MPP) is a unique effort that seeks to encourage major DoD prime contractors (mentors) to develop the technical and business capabilities of Small and Disadvantaged Businesses (SDB) and other eligible proteges. Originally conceived to develop a company or business's technical capabilities, MPP enables the protégé to expand their business base within the DoD marketplace.

Through credit toward subcontracting goals or some direct reimbursement of costs, the MPP provides incentives for these mentors to establish and implement a developmental assistance plan that enables the protégé to compete more successfully for DoD prime contracts and subcontract awards. Naturally, the firms represented in the MPP encompass a broad range of companies and contractors throughout the entire U.S. defense industry. DoD, however, makes no guarantees that subcontracts will result from participation in the program.

Army Col. Kenneth Dobeck, the U.S. Army Medium Tactical Vehicles (MTV) Project Manager, supported by a team from the Program Executive Office, Ground Combat and Support Systems, and the U.S. Army Tank-automotive and Armaments Command (TACOM), recently helped Electro National Corporation (ENC), a small, minority-owned manufacturer of electromechanical products, achieve certification to ISO 9002 standards. (ISO 9002 is an international quality standard recognized by all major industries located around the world.)

TVS 5-TON VEHICLE

This article is the story of that partnership, which succeeded well beyond their initial expectations, and a company that gained international recognition as a result of their combined efforts.

A Little Help Goes a Long Way

In achieving ISO 9002 certification, ENC had help and support from three sources: DoD, which sponsors the MPP; the U.S. Army Project Manager for Medium Tactical Vehicles, supported by TACOM, who initiated the contract effort in August 1995; and Tactical Vehicle Systems (TVS), a division of Stewart & Stevenson Services, Inc., in Sealy, Texas, who served as the mentor assisting its protégé (ENC). TVS, as the U.S. Army's prime contractor for the manufacture of the Family of Medium Tactical Vehicles (FMTV), was the logical choice to lead and guide ENC through the program.

In addition to assisting ENC with ISO certification, TVS (the mentor) guided ENC's efforts to achieve several other significant milestones. Among these milestones is the successful development of a start-up welding facility and certification of weldments to American Welding Society (AWS) standards D1.1 (steel) and D1.2 (aluminum). Contract awards

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Photo courtesy Stewart & Stevenson Services, Inc.

also include fire extinguisher brackets and cable and wiring harness assemblies for the FMTV and its variants.

As a result of these achievements, ENC bid on and won over $4.2 million in manufacturing business, with an additional projected revenue of $10 million.

Further, ENC has shown superior ability as a subcontractor to TVS and has been extremely successful with the development and production of two other components: the Troop Transport Alarm System and the Machine Gun Mount Platform Kit for the FMTV.

Troop Transport Alarm System
The development of the Troop Transport Alarm System was in response to a critical safety need expressed by TACOM. Due to safety concerns, TACOM required installation of this alarm on all FMTV vehicles that are capable of transporting troops. This project was critical to the U.S. Army; ENC responded to that critical need and successfully developed the Troop Transport Alarm System — a significant milestone in its development as a major DoD subcontractor.

Machine Gun Mount Platform Kit
ENC's production of the Machine Gun Mount Platform Kit was the result of winning a competitive bid offering by TVS. Platform kits were essential to the U.S. effort in Bosnia; thus, quantity and ship dates were extremely critical. ENC responded to this challenge by certifying welders and weldments, fabricating jigs and fixtures, proofing its processes, and shipping a quality product on time to reach the U.S. field troops for deployment in Bosnia.

As an added bonus, by responding to this challenge, ENC successfully completed a major mission of the Mentor-Protégé Program —welding certification.

Recent Successes

As further validation of ENC's increased competitiveness, ENC enjoyed its most recent successful bid when Israel Aircraft Industries, Ltd., awarded them a contract for current production. This contract, which involves building helicopter crashworthy troop seats for application on the U.S. Navy CH53 helicopter, has immense revenue potential for ENC over the next 10 years.

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> –Michael Trigleth
> President and General Manager, ENC

ENC's unqualified success in the Mentor-Protégé Program earned them a nomination for the prestigious Nunn-Perry Award for outstanding performance. Also, ENC emerged as a strong competitor in the national and international marketplace, and increased its value as a potential prime contractor for the DoD.

Currently, the Department of the Army Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization Office (SADBU) has approved a request by Dobeck for a new TVS/ENC Mentor-Protégé Agreement. Under the new agreement, ENC targeted four new missions: certification to ISO 9001, D1 9000, and QS 9000; implementation of advanced welding technology; vertical integration to metal fabrication; and the execution of adomestic and worldwide marketing plan.

ISO 9001, QS 9000, and D1 9000
The first mission encompasses the development of an ISO 9000 Series International Quality System; ISO 9001 — "Quality Systems — Model for Quality Assurance in Design, Development, Production, Installation, and Servicing," an associated QS 9000 Series Automotive Industry Quality System; and D1 9000 quality system tailored for the aircraft and aerospace industry.

Implementation of Advanced Welding Technology
As a second mission, TACOM and TVS will be assisting ENC in its development of advanced welding technology, including appropriate training programs.

Metal Fabrication
The third mission adds the development of metal fabrication capabilities to ENC's product line. Vertical integration to metal fabrication will assure that ENC will have the capability to develop and manufacture fabricated products. Once these fabricated products are manufactured to meet DoD standards and specifications as well as commercial requirements, ENC will become a qualified supplier of these products.

Program Management and Marketing
The fourth and final mission is program management and marketing. This is a continuation of management and marketing efforts that are:

- Mentor-Protégé program management issues as well as issues that relate to general program planning and business management.

- Organizational, financial, personnel management, marketing, business development, sales, and business trend analysis issues.

ENC collaborated with TVS to exhibit its products at Association of the U.S. Army (AUSA) Exhibits in 1995, 1996, and 1997; and participated in the Mentor-Protégé Conference in November 1997. Other trade shows and conferences in which ENC participated include National Design Engineering, National Plant Engineering and Management, Na-

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Army Col. Kenneth R. Dobeck is the Project Manager for the Family of Medium Tactical Vehicles, at the Tank-automotive & Armaments Command. Dobeck entered the Army as a second lieutenant in the Ordnance Corps after graduation from Norwich University with a B.S. in Mechanical Engineering. He is a graduate of Purdue University with an M.S. in Engineering Science, and also holds an M.S. in National Resource Strategies from the National Defense University.

His military education includes the Ordnance Basic Course; Engineer Advanced Course; Mapping, Charting and Geodesy Officer Course; and the Armed Forces Staff College.

Following completion of the Engineer Advanced Course, he served as Battalion Maintenance Officer and Company Commander, B Company, 547th Engineering Battalion, Darmstadt, Germany. Returning to the continental United States, he was assigned as Program Manager for the Engineer Topographic Laboratory, Fort Belvoir, Va., and as Program Manager for Defense Mapping Agency, Washington, D.C. Dobeck was assigned as Action Officer and Congressional Liaison for Special Access Programs, Office of the Secretary of Army for Research and Development (Special Operations); followed by an assignment as Product Manager for the heavy Assault Bridge, Tank-automotive & Armaments Command, Warren, Michigan.

Awards and decorations include the Meritorious Service Medal with three Oak Leaf Clusters and the Defense Meritorious Service Medal.

tional Industrial Enterprise IT, and National Industrial Automation.

TACOM and TVS Technical Assistance to ENC

TACOM and TVS continue to provide ENC ongoing technical assistance in production, manufacturing, industrial, electrical, mechanical and quality assurance engineering. This also includes technical assistance to develop future designs of electronic sensors and switches, electronic devices, and products ENC is currently producing.

TVS is continuing to offer ENC ongoing assistance with reviews of government and commercial requests for quotations/proposals and purchase orders, as well as assisting in proposal writing, bidding processes, and debriefings.

They've Come a Long Way

All of these efforts are designed to enhance ENC's capabilities and will permit ENC to perform successfully under prime contracts or subcontracts with DoD, federal agencies, and other commercial contracts ENC may be involved in as a result of the Mentor-Protégé Program.

"Certification of ENC's design capabilities is the next step identified in the new TVS/ENC Agreement under the Mentor-Protégé Program," says Ralph Stoddard, Mentor-Protégé Program Manager for TVS.

"From there, ENC must also develop specialized welding capabilities—for example, new techniques for welding galvanized steel that will help the Army overcome critical corrosion issues. In doing so, ENC will help extend the life cycle of these military vehicles and ultimately save the taxpayers' money."

Michael Trigleth, President and General Manager of ENC, speaks of the importance of the Mentor-Protégé Program to ENC's competitiveness throughout the defense industry. He explains that due to DoD spending cutbacks over the last decade, ENC was put at a disadvantage, and financially unable to pursue new business.

"ENC was hovering on the brink of closure and needed TVS' and Department of the Army's assistance to be a viable contender in the national and international marketplace," says Trigleth.

"Both TVS and the Department of the Army recognized that technical assistance, as well as transference of technology by TVS was necessary for ENC to survive as a company. Our vision for the future at ENC required developmental programs, such as the Mentor-Protégé Program, that could assist us in achieving our objectives and goals relevant to survival now, into, and throughout the 21st century."

The new TVS/ENC Agreement under the Mentor-Protégé Program, according to Trigleth, went into effect Sept. 30, 1998.